

## Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus*

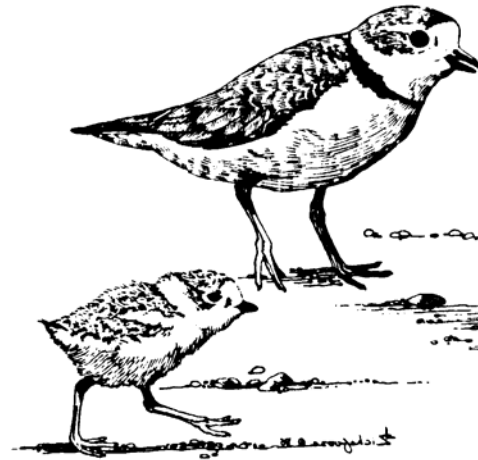
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**STATUS:** Endangered in the Great Lakes watershed, threatened in the remainder of its range, including coastal Texas (50 FR 50726, December 11, 1985).

**CRITICAL HABITAT:** The endangered Great Lakes breeding population has critical habitat on 201 miles of Great Lakes shoreline (66 FR 22938, May 7, 2001). The threatened populations have proposed critical habitat on the wintering grounds which includes areas on the Texas coast (65 FR 41782, July 6, 2001).

**DESCRIPTION:** A small, stocky migratory shorebird about 7 inches long with a wingspan of about 15 inches. Both sexes have pale brownish upper parts and white underparts. A dark band encircling the body below the neck, a dark stripe across the forecrown, and bright orange legs are distinguishing marks in summer adults. White rump conspicuous in flight distinguishes it from the snowy plover.

**HABITAT:** Nest sites include sandy beaches along the ocean or inland lakes; bare to sparsely vegetated areas on dredge-created and natural alluvial islands in rivers; gravel pits along rivers; and salt-encrusted bare areas of sand, gravel or pebbly mud on alkaline interior lakes and ponds; fly-ash disposal ponds; dike roads adjacent to lakes; and gravel roads and parking lots. Some evidence suggests that minimum beach width is a limiting factor, with birds nesting in areas of greatest beach width. In winter, piping plovers use beaches, sandflats, mudflats, algal mats, and dunes along the Gulf Coast and adjacent offshore islands, as well as spoil islands in intracoastal waterways.



### **DISTRIBUTION:**

**Present:** Nests along the Atlantic Coast, Great Lakes, and northern Great Plains. Populations drastically reduced, remnant populations occur throughout historic range. In Texas, statewide migrant. Winters along the Gulf Coast.

**Historic:** Common along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, and in the northern Great Plains, the Great Lakes, the Bahamas, and the West Indies.

**THREATS AND REASONS FOR DECLINE:** Loss and/or modification of habitat due to commercial, residential, and recreational development; dune stabilization; damming and channelization of rivers (eliminating sandbars, allowing vegetation to encroach and altering water flow); and wetland drainage. Other threats include human disturbance and recreational use of habitat. Increased urbanization has increased predation by skunks, foxes, and domestic pets.

**OTHER INFORMATION:** Recovery plan approved in 1988. Conservation efforts have included research into habitat requirements, predation, and feeding ecology; habitat protection and acquisition; law enforcement; and educational efforts. Diet consists mainly of marine worms, insects, crustaceans, and mollusks. Piping plovers are good habitat quality indicator species for ephemeral and vulnerable (freshwater and saline) wetland habitat in which they live. There are about 4,000 piping plovers left. The Texas Gulf Coast has the highest wintering population of piping plovers with about 1,900 individuals. They exhibit strong site fidelity and territoriality.

### **REFERENCES:**

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- Sidle, J.G., K. Mayne, E.N. McPhillips. 1991. Protecting the Piping Plover under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. *Environ. Man.* 15:349-356.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 1988. Great Lakes and Great Plains Piping Plover Recovery Plan. USFWS, Endangered Species Office, Twin Cities, MN., 160 pp.